

SELECT BOARD

Fiscal Year 2012

Much of the Select Board's work is standard and recurring. But each year is differentiated by notable points of progress, change, accomplishment and unpredictability. This report will summarize those elements for FY 12.

Town Management

The year began with Town Manager John Musante's performance review, assessing the nine months of FY 11 that he served in this position. The review was very positive, and the Select Board approved a new salary of \$140,000, up from \$127,500 the previous year. This reflected an effort to both reward his performance and to better align his compensation in the marketplace.

In early September, Mr. Musante was badly injured in a fall. The Select Board held an emergency meeting and appointed David Ziomek to serve as Acting Town Manager in his absence. Mr. Musante was on medical leave for about seven weeks and gradually transitioned back to working full-time. Mr. Ziomek filled in for him with distinction, working closely with the Select Board and Town staff to keep the business of the Town moving forward. We are grateful for the skill and dedication he brought to this and for his steady leadership in tough circumstances. All staff should be commended for their great work during this time, and the Select Board particularly appreciates Debra Roussel and Debbie Gordon for their tremendous assistance to us.

New Major Initiatives

Business Improvement District: In October, the Select Board approved the formation of Amherst's Business Improvement District (BID) in compliance with the process outlined in State law. The study and preparation that brought this proposal to us had been going on for more than a year, and the BID's creation represents exciting potential for enhancing downtown.

Sewer Extension: In October, the Select Board approved an updated Sewer Extension Master Plan. The approval vote was preceded by several informational meetings where the public could ask questions and offer comment. In approving the plan, the Select Board also approved its near-term implementation, to expand the sewer lines to the Harkness Road and Wildflower Lane areas. The question of how to fund the expansion was of greatest concern to affected residents, and the Select Board approved the Town Manager's recommendation to do so through the sewer fees, rather than through betterments. This is in keeping with past practice, and due to expiring debt from the previous expansion, the change to sewer bills will be negligible.

Retired Teachers Health Insurance: In June, the Select Board approved moving health insurance coverage for Amherst's retired teachers from the State's Group Insurance Commission (GIC) to the Town's self-insured Health Care Trust Fund. The vote followed a public hearing held jointly with the Regional School Committee and Pelham Select Board at which Town, School and insurance representatives answered questions and addressed concerns from retired teachers who would be impacted by the change, following which, the teachers cast

their votes in support or opposition to the proposal. The votes of support prevailed. The Town Manager, Finance Director Sandy Pooler, and Benefits Coordinator Kay Zlogar worked together with School officials to assess this change and manage its transition. It is expected to provide significant cost savings to the Town and the Region, while providing equal or improved insurance options to the retired teachers, and in most cases, saving them money as well.

Licensing

Amherst Cinema: An annual on-premise wine and malt license was approved for the Amherst Cinema Center. They had previously desired this, but none were available, so they had been using a seasonal license instead. With the new Census figures, Amherst's quota for the on-site wine and malt licenses increased by one, thus creating availability. The Select Board established a process for giving public notice of new license availability, so that other potential applicants could have due consideration. Amherst Cinema was the only applicant.

Cumberland Farms: An annual off-premise wine and malt license was rejected for Cumberland Farms on Belchertown Road. The quota for these is higher than current demand, so there has been license availability in this category. A change in State law allows an expansion in the number of such licenses that may be held by chain stores, prompting Cumberland Farms' application. There was significant public sentiment opposing allowing beer and wine sales at this gas station and convenience store, and no public comment in support. Ultimately, the Select Board decided that such sales at that location would not serve a public need and would be inconsistent with our efforts to discourage excessive drinking and its many negative local impacts. Cumberland Farms had the option to appeal the decision to the Massachusetts Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission (ABCC) but did not do so.

Taxis: With the renewal of Taxi Business Licenses in December, we gave one year's notice to all taxi companies to expect new taxi business regulations effective January 1, 2013, most notable among them being the requirement that all taxi vehicles have fare meters installed. This change is intended to address multiple issues of non-compliance and difficult enforcement, and will help increase passenger safety by professionalizing an industry that has grown dramatically in recent years with inadequate oversight.

Committee Issues

Housing: After long consideration and much comment, the Select Board voted to disband the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee and the Committee on Homelessness, and to instead take a unified approach to the full spectrum of housing needs with a new Housing and Sheltering Committee. This is expected to better address the much-changed local housing and sheltering situation, improve efficiency and communication by bringing experts together in one group, reducing and better-focusing staff liaison time, and improving outcomes.

Regionalization: Town Meeting established a Regional School District Planning Committee with members to be appointed by the Town Moderator. Alisa Brewer was appointed as the Select Board's representative to this group which will examine potential regionalization options for the elementary schools.

School Committee Vacancy: In February, a joint meeting of the Select Board and School Committee was held in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 11 to conduct an election to fill the vacancy on the School Committee created by the resignation of Steve Rivkin. There were eight candidates interested in occupying the position until the Annual Town Election in April. A high school senior, Solomon Goldstein-Rose, was elected.

Notable Elements of New or Ongoing Focus

Budget: The FY 13 Budget Process was smooth, well-coordinated and drama-free. Projections for level funding or above from State, coupled with the Town's excellent financial management and collaborative budget process across the Town, Schools and Library made for adequate and disciplined budgets.

Town-Gown: Continuing efforts to foster positive relationships and work together to address off-campus behavior issues included: the Select Board's and Town Manager's participation in the interview process for finalist candidates to fill the UMass Chancellor's position; hosting the Select Board's 3rd Annual Coffee Hour with UMass student leaders; ongoing active participation in the Campus & Community Coalition; and support for the Town Manager's Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative.

Regional Planning: The Select Board expressed unanimous support for the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's updated "Valley Vision II" regional land use plan. Amherst had been an exception in not signing on to the plan previously.

Green Initiatives: In support of the application to have Amherst designated as a "Green Community," the Select Board approved a fuel-efficient vehicle policy for the Town.

Water and Sewer Rates: In our role as Water and Sewer Commissioners, the Select Board approved and announced a 10 cent rate increase in January, to take effect in July. New water rates would be \$3.40 and sewer rates would be \$3.45, per 100 cubic feet.

Events: In addition to annual recurring events, the Select Board was honored to take part in many new events this year, including: groundbreakings for the new Amherst Survival Center on Sunderland Road and a medical building in the Professional Research Park at Amherst Woods; a ceremony in honor of Amherst's African-American Civil War heroes at West Cemetery; a ceremony marking completion of Amherst College's four-house Habitat for Humanity project on Stanley Street; the 100th Anniversary Celebration for Hope Church; the 50th anniversary celebration of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; and the ribbon-cutting for the renovated and re-opened Lord Jeffery Inn.

Halloween Storm: Another element of the challenging fall season included the major snowstorm at the end of October, which caused major damage across the region and left much of Amherst without power for a week. During that time, the Town Manager – just back from medical leave – kept the Select Board informed about tree damage, road clearing, power restoration expectations, and other key information about storm response so that we might help to circulate the information among residents as best that we could. It was quite a test of the Town's emergency preparedness, with both great successes and lessons learned.

Advocacy: The Select Board sent letters of support for a community-focused partnership in Cooley Dickinson Hospital's management transition; and advocating for the Governor to restore a projected \$65 million in local aid to the baseline allocations rather than being an additional appropriation in the fall. At Town Meeting, the Select Board advocated strongly for Village Center rezoning efforts in North Amherst and at Atkins Corner, both of which had strong support but fell short of the 2/3rds majority needed to pass at Fall and Annual Town Meetings.

Parking Policy: The Select Board approved a new policy in July that lets the Town Manager, in consultation with the Select Board Chair, make decisions on parking requests requiring action before the next scheduled Select Board meeting. This eliminates the need to hold additional short meetings for this purpose.

Town Flag: The Select Board approved a design for an official Town Flag, after a lengthy process. The designer is local artist Barry Moser. Diana Stein deserves much credit for encouraging this process.

Minutes: The backlog of pending meeting minutes was eliminated and a new process that keeps us current was established, thanks to the great work of Debra Roussel, Assistant to the Town Manager. Thanks also to Mr. Musante, for taking notes at our meetings.

Composition of the Select Board

At the Annual Town Election, Aaron Hayden ran unopposed for re-election. In the Select Board's annual reorganization vote, Stephanie O'Keefe was re-elected as Chair, Mr. Hayden was re-elected as Clerk, and the body voted to continue the practice of rotating the Vice Chair position alphabetically by last name each month. Alisa Brewer, Diana Stein and Jim Wald all continued their Select Board service.

It has been an honor for all of us to serve Amherst in this capacity for another year.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie O'Keefe, Chair